



# Summer Jobs Reduce Violence Among Disadvantaged Youth

## Key Details

### KEY WORDS

Youth violence, summer jobs, employment programs, disadvantaged youth, socio-emotional Learning (SEL), mentorship

### POPULATION GROUP

Racialized youth, Youth living in poverty, Youth in conflict with the law

### STEPPING UP THEMES

Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety

### RESEARCH ORIGIN

USA

### SOURCE

Academic

**“Prior research on youth employment suggests that only costly and intensive employment programs can reduce crime. The current study demonstrates that when offered to youth still in school, an intervention need not be lengthy to change behavior.”**

### 1. What is the research about?

In the United States, racialized youth are disproportionately affected by violent crime as either perpetrator or victim. Researchers suggest there is a connection between lack of employment opportunities and crime. Therefore, a common response to youth crime has been to provide employment programs for youth. However, these programs are typically offered after the crime has occurred. The results of these interventions are not promising: crime reduction is usually short-term and is very resource intensive. This study examines the potential of short-term, low-cost summer employment for youth who are still in school as a *preventative* rather than remedial intervention to decrease involvement in violent crime.

### 2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in Chicago, USA. It tested a public summer jobs program called One Summer Plus (OSP).

### 3. Who is this research about?

This research studied high school aged youth between the ages of 14-21 years who were still in school. Ninety-six percent of the youth who participated in this study were African-American; about 3% were Hispanic. Over 90% of the youth belonged to families that were eligible for free or reduced price lunches. Twenty percent of the youth participants had been arrested at baseline and 20% had been victimized. These youth lived in neighborhoods where violent crime rates were extremely high.

### 4. How was the research done?

This research was a large-scale randomized control trial with 1,634 disadvantaged high school youth living in Chicago who were randomly assigned to either participate in an eight-week part-time summer employment program or not. The youth in the control group were excluded from the OSP.

Youth who participated in the program were offered employment under the OSP. These youth were further divided into two groups:

- **Jobs-only group:** Youth were offered 25 hours of paid employment for a period of 8 weeks
- **Jobs + SEL group:** Youth were paid for 15 hours of work and 10 hours of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) per week. SEL helped youth with aspects of behavior such as management of thoughts, emotions, and conflicts.

All youth were assigned job mentors in the ratio 1:10. These were caring adults who helped make the transition to employment successful.

There was a 16-month follow-up period. Data from the youth participants in the study were matched with individual level Chicago Police Department arrest records concerning juveniles and adults. Student level administrative records from Chicago public schools were also studied to measure the pre-post program academic outcomes.

## 5. What are the key findings?

Violent crime arrests of youth who participated in the OSP decreased by 43% when compared to the youth who did not participate in the program. The program's effect extended 5-11 months after the conclusion of the program.

Researchers attributed this change to the job mentors who provided caring support to the youth, the soft-skills they learned on the job (with the mentor), and the SEL program, which equipped youth with training on social information processing and goal-setting.

Over the course of the study, the researchers could not see evidence that the program improved schooling outcomes. This suggests that personal investment in the value of education does not affect involvement in violent crime. Rather, the reduction is likely due to the acquisition of soft-skills and SEL.

## 6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

The researcher cautions that policy-makers, funders, and organizations should wait to see the results of additional studies that can examine questions related to the program

such as: who is this most effective for, how long do the effects last, and is this the best investment to produce the intended outcomes? However, the results of this study do suggest that well-structured, low-cost summer employment programs can have a preventative effect on youth involvement in violent crime when offered while they are still in school. The presence of adult mentors encouraged and supported the youth participants. Programs should offer opportunities to learn and apply soft-skills along with employment in order to help youth competently and meaningfully navigate the world of work.



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<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/346/6214/1219.full>